

RELIGION IN ILLINOIS

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ILLINOIS IN SEATTLE

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Illinois

Religion

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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CHAPTER XIII.

ECCLESIASTICAL RIVALRIES.

During this era of anti-slavery agitation, New England Puritanism was disturbed by the rapid development of the Roman Catholic Church in the Northwest. The French Catholic priests of the early days had offered little opposition to the Protestants. They did not object to the distribution of tracts and Bibles among their own people, and they never attempted to take the matter of education from the Protestants, who were so eager and so sure of their own method. What now particularly alarmed the Home Missionary Society and its constituency, was what appeared to be a definite plan on the part of European Catholics to capture a large part of the Northwest for their faith.

A warning was given in May, 1842, through the organ of the society: "The territory of this nation is an unlimited and inviting field, to which the human swarms are gathering from other lands. The crumbling dynasties of the old world are sending hither materials to reconstruct the fabrics which are there tottering to ruin. Already the foundations are laid for social institutions such as our own fathers knew not. Foreign Papists are planting our fairest territories thick with their schools. Colony after colony of men of a strange tongue and stranger associations, are possessing themselves of our soil and gathering around our ballot boxes." "In Missouri, Illinois and Arkansas there are seventy-four priests with literary institutions of every grade in which, at least, a thousand youths are now training—here then the very heart of the West is infected and every pulsation throws abroad a strain of influence baneful to the civil freedom and religious well-being of unnumbered thousands."¹

More hopeful was the following expression: "The most formidable foe of the universal spread of the Gospel is, doubtless, to be found in the Roman apostacy—where else could the contest be bloodless, where so successful as here, where no racks or tortures forestall the force of argument—here where the benighted children of error will be surrounded and pervaded by the silent but resistless influence of our schools and presses; here, where every one of them may stand erect and feel that he is a man and may assert his right to doubt as well as to believe; to discuss and judge as well as to listen and obey? Instead, therefore, of deprecating the coming of so many foreigners as a curse, we should regard it as the fulfillment of our national destiny."

¹ *Annual Report of Home Missionary Society, June, 1842.*

In July of this year, 1842, it was reported that an agent from Illinois had been in England and on the continent for the purpose of sending emigrants to the western states. Money to buy lands in Illinois and elsewhere had been raised. Land offices had been opened in England and Germany for the sale of western lands. The emigration from Ireland, England and Germany was large.¹

In November of this year, the "Grand Scheme" itself is fully advertised and exposed with increased effort to rouse public sentiment against what was held to be an impending danger: "That there is a formal conspiracy of the crowned heads of Europe to bring our republic under papal control, as has been sometimes asserted, may or may not be true. But there can be no doubt that many of the potentates and grandees of Catholic Europe greatly desire such a result. The nobility and political economists who regard with amazement and terror the accumulation of masses of population in the overcrowded states of the old world, without instruction, without employment, and without bread, have a powerful reason for pushing these masses off upon our comparative vacant territory."

During 1842 a pamphlet was issued in London and Dublin, entitled "Proposed New Plan of a General Emigration Society; by a Catholic Gentleman." The object was to be the sending of the Irish poor to America. From this well written pamphlet the editors of the missionary magazine made large extracts. The reasons for such emigration are stated, as follows: "1. To dispose of excess of population. 2. To create demand for British manufactures. 3. To make the Catholic religion predominant in the United States." The pamphlet contained a map copied by the missionary magazine to show the region it was thought best to settle in. The territory included Upper Canada, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and part of Iowa. The desirableness of this country was proven by descriptive extracts from De Tocqueville, Captain Marryatt, Miss Martineau and Judge Haliburton. The officials of the Home Missionary Society drew three conclusions from this document: "1. We may expect colonization stimulated and systematized more and more. 2. The great field of conflict for religious and political supremacy will be the West. 3. *Now* is the time to save the West."

In the following year, 1843, the foundation of certain benevolent societies in Europe to advance Catholicism in America gave further occasion for alarm. Frederick Rese, Vicar General of the Diocese of Cincinnati, interested himself particularly in the spread of Catholic missions in America, promoting the gathering of funds for this purpose in a memorial to Leopoldina, Empress of Brazil. The Pope granted special indulgences to those aiding this fund, and Metternich wrote to the Bishop of Cincinnati commending the movement. It soon gathered \$61,000. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith at Lyons, during 1840, appropriated \$160,000 to missions in America.²

The intense feeling on the subject occasioned even such extravagant language as that used in an address in Painesville, Ohio, in

¹ *Home Missionary*, July, 1842.

² *Home Missionary*, February, 1843.

1844: "The Apocalyptic Beast is watching with intense anxiety, and straining his eyeballs for a favorable moment to spring in upon us with one immense bound and make us his prey. Rome has more men, more money, more cunning and more perseverance than we have. Rome never stops short of universal victory or universal defeat."¹

From this time on Romanism is classed with intemperance and slavery as an evil threatening the country. The citation of a few titles of articles appearing in the *Home Missionary*, show the nature of the Protestant opposition: "Jesuits in the United States," January 1846; "Catholic Clergy in the United States," February, 1846; "Indulgences," June, 1848; "Aid to the Roman Catholic Church in America," August, 1848; "Jesuit Seminaries at the West," October, 1851; "Does the Romish Church Discourage the Reading of the Bible?" July, 1853.

The utterances on the subject, of some of the most distinguished men of the day will show how seriously the matter was regarded. Dr. Leonard Bacon referred to the "gigantic efforts of the Papal church to achieve for itself the dominion of this hallowed soil."² Professor Park, of Andover, wrote: "Send our armies to the great valley where the Pope will reign unless Puritanism be triumphant. Remembering the fires of Smithfield and the ashes of our fathers who sleep in Bunhill fields, let us pray together for this 'vine'."³ Speaking of the moral conflicts before the country, Dr. Mark Hopkins wrote: "Rome and despotism are pouring in the materials of which mobs are made. Infidelity in its various forms is more extensive than many suppose. When we remember the sectional jealousies and distracting relations of slavery, and see how easily the standard of a civil and servile war might be unfurled, we cannot see the burden on the church likely to be diminished in our day."⁴

Catholicism was not the only "error" by which the West was assailed. The missionary fathers, after the comparative uniformity in religious beliefs to which they were accustomed in New England were astonished and shocked at the sectarian divisions, the multiplicity of sects, with which they came in contact in the West. Rev. Julian M. Sturtevant writes as follows of the conditions in New England when he was a boy:⁵ "We had Baptist, Episcopal and Methodist churches, but they were far too few in number to seriously impair the unity of the New England church life. The Baptists were numerous only in Rhode Island. Both they and the Methodist societies that were beginning to be organized here and there, usually sought locations remote from Congregational places of worship, and thus rarely came in contact with them. The world was then broad enough for all. There was no crowding. The consequence was that the church in any particular town was not regarded as the representative of some distinct denomination, but simply as a branch of the church of Christ, 'the Church Universal.' We thought of ours as

¹ *Home Missionary*, June, 1844.

² *Home Missionary*, May, 1852.

³ *Ibid.*, September, 1845.

⁴ *Ibid.*, November, 1845.

⁵ *Julian M. Sturtevant, An Autobiography*, 23.

the 'Warren Christian Church.' If, in my childhood, I had heard our place of worship mentioned as Congregational, I would have needed to ask an explanation of the unusual term. Such was the vantage ground of the Connecticut churches at the time of which I am speaking, and the same thing might be said of the larger portion of Massachusetts and also of a considerable part of Vermont and New Hampshire. I call it vantage ground, not, however, to Congregationalists as a religious denomination, but to Christianity."

How different the condition in Illinois. One settlement of eighty families had fourteen sects. One town of 800 inhabitants had eight denominations. The missionaries soon began to class together the forms that seemed to them most disastrous. This despairing picture of southeastern Illinois in 1835 brings them all together: "One or two churches are dead, two or three more are soon to expire. At Vincennes a Catholic college and nunnery are soon to be built. Romanism, Arianism, Universalism, Campbellism, Deism and almost every delusion prevail."¹ Another writer sums up the errors in this form: "The West is the arena where the contest is to be carried on between Infidelity, Romanism, Mormonism and Satanism on one side and Christianity on the other."

To their sorrow they had to confess that many of the "false teachers," the Roman Catholic priests, the Mormons, preachers of Universalism, the Millerites, lecturers on Atheism, mesmerism and phrenology, came from the east. Another cause for chagrin was that Northern Illinois was most seriously affected; the Fox river region was the "stronghold of Universalism," Hancock county was almost entirely given over to the Mormons, while the nearby valley of the Des Moines was a center of infidelity under the leadership of Abner Kneeland. "Paine's 'Age of Reason' is read with avidity in many families and its doctrines advocated by men of influence. Not a few mothers drink in this poison. Many immigrants from Europe are disciples of Hume and Voltaire. Clubs and associations are found in almost all of our towns on the rivers."² One family went so far as to keep their family record in Tom Paine instead of the Bible.

One sect, which at the present time has good standing, in that day particularly aroused the indignation of the Easterner. "Campbellism" was described as the "bane of the West," the "common enemy of all evangelical Christianity." These people were also known as "Disciples," and were the followers of Alexander Campbell of Bethany, Virginia. Rev. J. M. Sturtevant was much criticised for fellowship with a church of this sect near Jacksonville, and it was scarcely considered an evangelical body. While not slow to oppose the doctrines of some of their leaders, Sturtevant kept up his friendly relations with the Disciples and in his old age wrote: "It is my belief that no portion of the religious community around us has grown in grace more rapidly than that denomination."³

¹ *Home Missionary*, March, 1835.

² *Home Missionary*, December, 1841.

³ *Julian M. Sturtevant, An Autobiography*, 248.

Most blighting in its influence for the short time it remained in Illinois was the Mormon propaganda. Driven from Missouri the Mormons had established themselves at Nauvoo, in Hancock county, where they arrived in 1839. The effect on the community was immediate. Nearly all the old citizens became anxious to sell their property and many prepared to move away, so great was the disinclination to live near the Mormons. "Their recruits come from churches where the cardinal doctrines of the Bible are kept in the the background." A Mormon preacher was reported to have said that he would as soon undertake to make "sugar out of dry hickory as to make a Mormon out of a Congregationalist."¹

In a year or two it was apparent that the Mormons intended to rule the region politically as well as religiously. Since somewhat recently popular articles by Mormon writers have appeared in some of the magazines in which persecutions suffered by the Mormons in Illinois and attending their departure from Missouri are dwelt upon, contemporary witness to the experiences and feelings of the community may be of interest. In August, 1842, a missionary in Hancock county wrote: "The Mormon farce is manifestly drawing to a close. They are rallying from every point to this county for the purpose of carrying the elections and thus getting all the public business into their own hands, and there is a state of growing excitement among the rest of the community. I am afraid the next August election will not pass by without bloodshed. I presume Nauvoo is as perfect a sink of debauchery and every species of abomination as ever were Sodom or Nineveh."² The next year the report is that there are 15,000 Mormons in the county; that they hold all the offices. Old citizens are much disturbed. It seems like the eve of an outbreak, while the Mormons themselves are "worse than all that has been said about them."³ But the end was not yet. In 1845 the "old citizens are irritated almost to desperation by the daily insults and depredations upon their property, by a people whom a few years since they received into their bosom and both clothed and fed as poor, deluded, persecuted objects of charity. But they were themselves scarcely less deluded. They now suffer, as a consequence of their benefaction, the loss of business, of personal safety and general prosperity to the country. The absorbing question with this whole people now is, how shall we rid ourselves of this curse? We were afraid the people would drive it from their borders by violence, but God seems to have purposed that it shall ripen among us and with wonderful suddenness perish utterly in its own corruption."⁴

Rev. J. M. Grout, the missionary at Warsaw, wrote in February, 1846, that life and property were not safe. In September of the same year he wrote that ten surrounding counties had pledged themselves to see that the Mormons move from Illinois and already most of them had fled to Missouri. He had attended three funerals of prominent citizens killed by Mormons in the last three months. At one time

1. *Home Missionary*, November, 1840.

2. *Ibid.*, August, 1842.

3. *Ibid.*, October, 1843.

4. *Home Missionary*, October, 1845.

parties of Mormons went about terrorizing the county. The next month Mr. Grout reported nearly all the Mormon property as sold and at higher rates than their opponents could have got for theirs had the Mormons remained. "A miserable remnant, perhaps 2,000, still remained in Nauvoo, the objects of suspicion, hatred and fear. Their temple is yet unsold. The main body is encamped almost within speaking distance. The old citizens are impatient of such delay and fearful of their return." Four months later he writes: "Controversy seems to have closed. Order and quiet has reigned since a few days after the battle which induced Mormons and semi-Mormons to leave Nauvoo. A few acts of theft have been committed, but the offenders have been dealt with promptly according to law." His words of a year later show how deep the demoralization of the region had been. "Great prudence, discernment, patience and forbearance were necessary to persuade a population which had been inflicted with the vicinity of Mormonism to commence anew to build up society and the utmost sagacity to keep them at work."¹ The "temple," which seems to have been a problem to both parties, was burned in 1848; the "work of some nefarious incendiary," an act which was not approved by the better portion of the population. It was not till 1853 that the missionaries reported Hancock county as really recovering from the Mormon occupation.

Jo Daviess county suffered from a smaller Mormon invasion under rather peculiar circumstances. Many came directly from Nauvoo, but more "from the colony of one Strang, who, in view of the corruption of the church at Nauvoo, attempted to establish a reformed Mormon church in Wisconsin. Many of his followers left him, and his attempt to impose phosphorescent light for cloven tongues defeated his whole enterprise. This colony is the result of the breaking up of these two dens since their faith and confidence in their leaders is not strong enough to take them to California."²

One cannot emphasize too strongly the utter lack of any ground of agreement between such colonies and the New England settlers. The Mormons appeared too late to gain a real foothold in Illinois and had to do pioneer work in the unoccupied field of Utah to make a permanent hold for themselves.

1. *Home Missionary*, March, 1848.

2. *Ibid.*, September, 1848.

Regions in Illinois

Drawer 12A

Illinois in General

